



# United States Department of the Interior

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## CHENEY SLATE LANDSCAPE MANAGEMENT PROJECT DECISION RECORD

### I. INTRODUCTION

The BLM's interdisciplinary planning team has designed the Cheney Slate Landscape Management Project (LMP) (from here on referred to as the Cheney Slate LMP) in the Lower Applegate Watershed based on current resource conditions in the project area, and to meet the objectives and direction of the 1995 Record of Decision and Resource Management Plan (1995 ROD/RMP). The proposals presented and evaluated in the Cheney Slate LMP Environmental Assessment (EA) reflect what the planning team believes to be the best balance of resource conditions, resource potential and competing management objectives. Planning involved extensive public involvement and outreach during project development, and incorporated meetings with numerous groups (Applegate Partnership, Lower Applegate Citizen Advisory Group), public field trips and public meetings.

With the exception of a small Late-successional Reserve (LSR)/Adaptive Management Reserve (AMR) thinning project that would be sold as a small timber sale (Spencer Wallow), the main commercial timber sale portion of the project and associated road construction analyzed as part of Alternative 2 is being deferred and will be decided on in a separate Decision. Some of the Density Management, Modified Group Select and Understory Reduction treatments will be completed under stewardship contracts; all these actions are Not Likely to Adversely Affect for the Northern Spotted Owl and No Affect for Southern Oregon/Northern California coho salmon. Road maintenance; young stand management; fuel hazard reduction; noxious weed treatments; and special forest products action would be implemented as described below. All project design features are integral to the selected alternative and will be implemented. See section III, Decision and Rationale for details on the decision.

As stated in the EA (pp. 12-13), the actions proposed and analyzed in the EA were developed to be consistent with, and/or tier to the following:

1. Final EIS and ROD for the 1995 Medford District Resource Management Plan (RMP) (1995)
2. Final Supplemental EIS on Management of Habitat for Late-Successional and Old-Growth Forest Related Species within the Range of the Northern Spotted Owl (1994)
3. ROD for Amendments to Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management Planning Documents Within the Range of the Northern Spotted Owl and its attachment A entitled the Standards and Guidelines for Management of Habitat for Late-Successional and Old-Growth Forest Related Species Within the Range of the Northern Spotted Owl (NWFP) (1994)

4. Final SEIS for Amendment to the Survey & Manage, Protection Buffer, and other Mitigation Measures Standards and Guidelines (2000), and the ROD and Standards and Guidelines for Amendment to the Survey & Manage, Protection Buffer, and other Mitigation Measures Standards and Guidelines (2001)
5. Medford District Noxious Weed Environmental Assessment (1998)
6. ROD for Management of Port-Orford Cedar in Southwest Oregon (2004)

The EA also tiered to the Final Environmental Impact Statement for the Revision of the Resource Management Plans of the Western Oregon Bureau of Land Management (2008) and the Medford District Record of Decision and Resource Management Plan (2008)

On July 16, 2009, Ned Farquhar, Acting Assistant Secretary for Lands and Minerals Management, U.S. Department of the Interior, withdrew the Records of Decision (2008 ROD) for the Western Oregon Plan Revision and directed the BLM to implement actions in conformance with the resource management plans for western Oregon that were in place prior to December 30, 2008. The RMP in place for the Medford District BLM prior to December 30, 2008 was the 1995 RMP, under which the Cheney Slate RMP was developed (EA p. 2). As stated above, and in the EA (pp. 2; 12-13), this project is consistent with management direction and objectives for the various land allocations and resources of the 1995 RMP, and remains consistent with the EISs and related documents (# 1 through 6 above).

Because most of the analysis and drafting of the EA was completed or in process at the time the 2008 ROD was signed, many of the references, discussions and land allocations contained in the EA refer to the 1995 RMP. In light of the withdrawal of the WOPR RODs, and as with the EA, the reader may assume that any discussions that do not specifically reference the 2008 ROD/RMP are referencing the 1995 RMP.

The implementation of this project will not have significant environmental effects beyond those already identified in the 1995 Final EIS/Proposed RMP. The proposed action does not constitute a major federal action having significant effects on the human environment; therefore, an environmental impact statement will not be prepared (see enclosed Finding of No Significant Impact).

## **II. BACKGROUND**

Public involvement for this project has been extensive. It has involved a variety of approaches including letters, community meetings, public tours of sites within the project area, and extensive conversations and discussions with groups and individual residents of the Applegate Valley and the region. From this involvement it is abundantly clear that the range of views and preferences about resource management on BLM lands in the project area and the Applegate Valley is very broad. There does, however, appear to be broad consensus in several areas: a) there is widespread recognition that the potential for severe wildfires is high and that the consequences to the community of such fires could be enormous; b) there is a widespread desire that the wildfire potential be addressed and reduced in a substantive way; c) there is a widespread desire to frame BLM's public land management activities in a way that will promote forest ecosystem

restoration, although there is a great diversity of views about what this means, what it might include or what is permissible within the concept of “restoration;” and d) there is a widespread concern over unauthorized OHV use and dumping of trash on public lands.

Public scoping began on May 9, 2007, with a scoping letter being sent to approximately 3,700 residents and landowners near or adjacent to BLM parcels within the planning area, to federal, state, and county agencies, and to tribal and private organizations and individuals that requested information concerning projects of this type. A second scoping letter was sent on February 28, 2008 to approximately 380 groups or individuals who expressed an interest in staying informed of the project. Numerous meetings were held with private regional and local organizations, and individual landowners. Three public field trips and two public meetings were held and numerous phone conversations with individuals helped to inform the public of project planning, and to inform BLM of the public’s concerns.

The BLM’s interdisciplinary planning team has designed the Cheney Slate project in a manner that strives to be sensitive to the range of views and values, to the resource management mandates that are set forth in the various pertinent laws and resource plans, and to the current resource conditions in the project area. In designing and presenting an integrated and multi-faceted project plan, the planning team has created what it believes to be the best balance of these factors and objectives. The result is a project that includes a broad suite of recreation, road, wildlife habitat, forest stand, and fuel hazard reduction activities. It provides commercial and non-commercial outputs as directed by the Bureau’s Strategic Plan and the RMP.

The proposed 26,970 acre Cheney Slate LMP is located within the 90,634 acre Lower Applegate 5<sup>th</sup> field watershed and within the Applegate Adaptive Management Area (AMA). It proposes a variety of activities to address the purpose and need for the project, ranging from commercial timber harvest, to non-commercial thinning, fuel hazard reduction, habitat restoration and enhancement, young stand management, road work and construction of a recreation trail. Approximately 22,351 acres are BLM-administered Oregon and California Railroad (O&C) land; 4,619 acres are BLM-administered public domain land; 12,303 acres are US Forest Service land; and an estimated 51,361 acres are privately owned. Approximately 11,437 acres of BLM lands are also within Late-successional Reserve (EA p.4), and there are three Northern Spotted Owl protected “core” areas in the project area totaling 329 acres.

The Cheney Slate LMP EA was available for public review from July 7 through August 6, 2009. It incorporated analysis of the proposed actions; addressed issues raised in public scoping comments, and referenced new information.

During the comment period, many comments were received that clearly show the value placed on this area by many members of local communities as well as people from other areas. Values and concerns identified by commenters include (but are by no means limited to) risk of fire hazard, species diversity, riparian areas, both support and disapproval of commercial harvest, recreational opportunities, healthy fisheries, and wildlife habitat to name a few. For a more detailed summary of public comments, see Appendix B, Public Comment Summary and Response at the end of this document.

In designing the Cheney Slate LMP to address current resource conditions, the BLM interdisciplinary team was aware of and sensitive to the range of views and values of the public while complying with a variety of resource management mandates. As a result, the Cheney Slate LMP is an integrated and multi-faceted plan that balances these factors and objectives.

Based on the extensive public input, recommendations from the planning team, and careful consideration of the objectives of the laws, regulations, and planning documents and NEPA analysis governing these lands, the following constitutes my decision.

### **III. DECISION and RATIONALE**

Alternative 1, the No Action Alternative, is rejected because it does not meet the resource management objectives identified in the Medford District Resource Management Plan or the objectives for resources detailed in the EA (EA pp. 5-11). The No Action Alternative would not address or alter many of the existing resource conditions and trends that are of major concern relative to healthy forest conditions and resource protection. The No Action alternative would perpetuate or promote undesirable resource conditions, and these conditions would not be improved or mitigated. Certain undesirable ecological trends would continue unchanged and, in some cases, would be exacerbated over time. For example, high fire hazard conditions would continue and increase, and stand vigor would continue to decline.

Because of limitations on treatments allowed under current consultation for the Northern Spotted Owl, Alternative 2 is chosen to maximize treatments acres which would increase the level of timber and other forest products produced from this project, and results in more acres treated for fuel hazard reduction. Alternative 3 and 4 are both rejected because they do not provide the balance of commodity production and other resource uses outlined in the RMP, and do not meet the purpose and need (EA pp. 2-14) or resource specific objectives outlined in the Proposed Action (EA pp. 5-11) as well as other alternatives. Particularly, Alternative 3 would treat 45 fewer acres and Alternative 4 would treat 187 fewer acres. While these alternatives would meet RMP and project objectives to an extent, they will also not treat as many acres of riparian reserves (six acres fewer in Alternative 3 and 43 acres fewer in Alternative 4 of noncommercial treatments) that would benefit from the accelerated development of late-successional stand characteristics, large wood sources, and reduced fire hazard. Alternatives 3 and 4 are also rejected because they would result in fewer overall acres of fuel hazard reduction (EA p. 23).

It is my decision to implement, in part and as outlined below, Alternative 2 for the Cheney Slate Landscape Management Project, and Alternative 4 for the Bolt Mountain trail construction. The main commercial timber sale portion of the project and associated roads analyzed as part of Alternative 2 is being deferred and will be decided on in a separate Decision. All riparian harvest and road construction is also deferred under the decision. A small LSR/AMR thinning project (51 acres) will be sold as a small timber sale (Spencer Wallow), Some of the Density Management, Modified Group Select and Understory Reduction treatments will be completed under stewardship contracts (EA p. 19). Road maintenance (EA p. 21); young stand management (EA p. 21-22); fuel hazard reduction (p. 22-24); noncommercial riparian reserve treatments (EA p. 25-27); noxious weed treatments (EA p. 28) and special forest products action

(EA p. 28-30) would be implemented as described below. All project design features are integral to the selected alternative and will be implemented (EA pp. 30-38).

There are no other future foreseeable commercial entries on BLM lands in the project area. The Forest Service's Butcher Knife Slate project may include approximately 2,093 acres of commercial thinning / fuels reduction, 619 acres of non-commercial thinning / fuels reduction and 4,646 acres of prescribed burning (EA p. 43). The effects from the Forest Service proposals are not expected to be much different than those analyzed for commercial harvest and prescribed fire proposals under this project. When added to the BLM harvest proposal under this alternative, the cumulative harvest currently being considered on public land is 5,036 acres (2,943 acres of BLM lands in this project (EA p. 16), and 2,093 acres of U.S. Forest Service lands (EA p. 43), which represents 5.6% of the Lower Applegate watershed. Private industrial or county forestland is managed on a rotational basis on approximately 6.9% of the watershed. (EA p.43)

The following section provides details of my decision and the rationale for my decision. Resources and issues will be addressed in the same order in which they are presented in the EA. All actions in this decision are Not Likely to Adversely Affect the Northern Spotted Owl and are included in Biological Assessments and Letters of Concurrence from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. All actions are also No Affect for Southern Oregon/Northern California coho salmon. See Consultation (Section IV below) for details.

## **A. Commercial Activities**

### **1. Commercial Timber Harvest (EA pp.17-20)**

*Decision:* The decision is to defer the majority of the commercial timber harvest including all the regeneration harvest and hardwood conversion, and implement other stand harvest and post harvest treatments as outlined in Alternative 2. All riparian harvest units are also deferred under this decision. Units deferred or treated under a modified prescription include all harvest treatments that would be Likely to Adversely Affect the Northern Spotted Owl. Other units deferred from treatment are those that exceed a No Effect determination for Southern Oregon/Northern California coho salmon. Units deferred from treatment under this decision may be treated under the terms of a different decision and contract at a later date.

BLM will proceed with an advertised timber sale (Spencer Wallow) in the Deer Creek Late-successional Reserve on units identified in Table DR-1 as part of the Cheney Slate LMP. The project area borders the Deer Willy Fuel Hazard Reduction (FHR) Project in the neighboring Williams Creek watershed. The Spencer Wallow timber sale is in Late-successional Reserve and includes 11 acres of the Deer Willy FHR project (EA # OR117-08-02). This table also includes the units from Deer Willy that would be packaged with the Cheney Slate units in the Spencer Wallow timber sale. Forty acres in the Cheney Slate project area will be harvested with a Variable Density Thinning (EA p. 26) prescription in young stands (<80 years old). The Variable Density Thinning (VDT) prescription will leave between 10% and 20% in cut and leave patches in even proportions and a residual minimum canopy closure of 40%. The remaining 11 acres of young stands in the timber sale will be treated under Level 2 prescriptions addressed in

the Deer Willy EA, select thinning of trees less than 20 inch DBH, maintaining an average 50% canopy closure.

The Spencer Wallow timber sale includes only portions of the units from Cheney Slate and Deer Willy (i.e., only 8 acres of the 29 acres OI Unit 38-6-13 (006) is included in the timber harvest). The remainder of the units will be treated under the same Variable Density Thinning or Select Thinning prescription under a stewardship or other service contract.

OI Unit	OI Unit Acres	Timber Sale Unit # (acres)	Harvest Type	Logging Method	Project
38-6-13 (006)	29	13-6 (8)	VDT	Cable	Cheney Slate
38-6-13 (019)	15	13-13A (6)	VDT	Cable	Cheney Slate
38-6-13 (002)	6	13-13B (2)	VDT	Cable	Cheney Slate
38-6-14 (014)	45	14-14 (24)	VDT	Tractor	Cheney Slate
38-6-13 (A)	11	13-A (11)	Select thin	Tractor	Deer Willy
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>51</b>	<b>Est. Volume: 561 thousand board feet (mbf)</b>		

\* VDT = Variable Density Thinning

Additional timber harvest will also occur under stewardship, small timber sale, or other service contracts. Actions will include combinations of density management and/or modified group select on 56 acres (18 acres in riparian reserve) in productive non-reserve Douglas-fir/tanoak sites (56 acres is 0.2% and 0.06% of the project area and watershed, respectively). The residual density would range between 25% on dry ridges and 45% on the lower, wet sites. Density management / understory reduction will occur on 648 acres in productive non-reserve Douglas-fir/tanoak sites for forest development purposes. This amounts to 2.4% and 0.7% of the project area and watershed, respectively). Variable Density Thinning (EA p. 26) will occur on 273 acres on the Adaptive Management Area land allocation and Restoration Thinning (EA p. 25) will occur on 108 acres for riparian reserve enhancement. Specific units for treatment are listed in Appendix A, Unit Treatments, below. Note that the prescription for six units will be modified to retain 60% canopy and retain key habitat characteristics to meet the conditions for Not Likely to Adversely Affect Northern Spotted Owls.

After harvest, fuel hazard will be assessed by an interdisciplinary team and planned fuel treatments may be modified to ensure that overall unit objectives are met. Any changes made to the fuel hazard reduction planned for a unit would be within the scope of the fuel treatment options assessed in the EA and their anticipated impacts. For a more complete description of post treatment fuel hazard evaluation, see section 4, below.

Of the approximately 2,943 acres analyzed for potential harvest in Alternative 2 (EA p. 17-20), units addressed in this decision total 1,165 acres of commercial timber harvest, approximately 4.4% of the BLM acres in the project area, and approximately 1.3% of the 90,634 acre Lower

Applegate 5<sup>th</sup> Field watershed. The remaining acres were determined to not be viable for a commercial timber sale, and vegetation treatments, with the exception of the Spencer Wallow timber sale, will be implemented under stewardship contracts.

*Rationale:* Harvest in the Late-successional Reserve under the Spencer Wallow Timber Sale is in young stands (<80 years old) that were identified as needing thinning to accelerate tree growth, retard crown recession and introduce structural diversity through the use of gaps and leave patches. Without some treatment, future stand development will be slowed because of competition between trees for resources (e.g., nutrients and water) in these stands, delaying development of late-succession habitat. The Variable Density Thinning prescription will provide for some timber volume while providing for protection and enhancement of habitat within the LSR/AMR.

Harvest in older seral stands will reduce stand densities, perpetuate the historic mixture of tree species, promote multi-layered stand structure, reduce the risk of a stand replacement fire, and contribute to meeting the BLM's commitment to produce timber/forest resources (EA p. 7). Current stand densities are higher than desired, leaving trees susceptible to insects, disease and fire. Release of pine and oak will perpetuate these stand components which are currently threatened by high stand densities, understory competition, high canopy closures and high duff layers. Treatments are designed to retain multiple canopy layers, snags, down wood and large hardwoods in order to promote structural diversity.

Fire exclusion over the past decade has resulted in a significant departure from the historical range of natural fire, and the risk of losing forested stands is high. As a result, the changes to species composition, structural stage, stand age, dead fuel loadings and canopy closure have increased the risk of large, high intensity stand replacement fires which have the potential to degrade older seral stands (EA pp. 84-87).

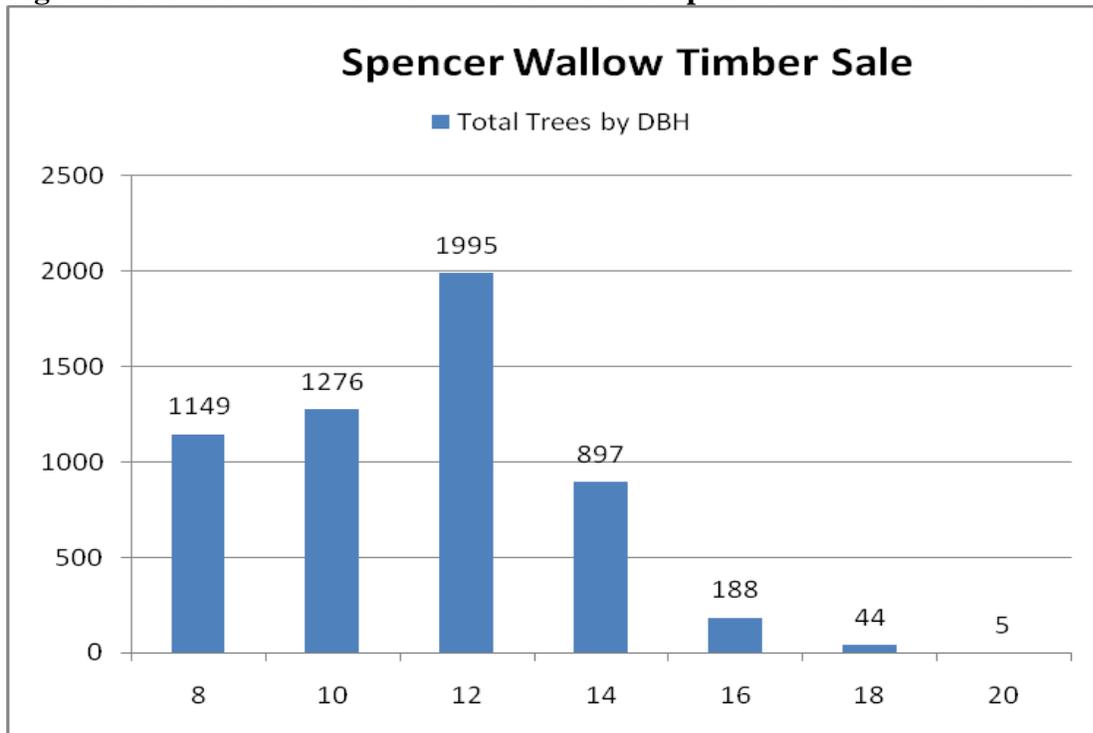
The silvicultural prescription and marking guidelines call for Variable Density Thinning and Density Management in the units proposed for harvest. The prescription and marking guidelines favor the retention of large, dominant trees that display old-growth characteristics, as smaller co-dominants and suppressed trees are removed. This project objective conforms with the Medford District RMP which states that on matrix lands "emphasize retention of the largest trees and snags available to provide the unique structure and functions associated with these large old trees" (RMP p. 39; EA p. 9), an objective consistent with the Adaptive Management Area objective of "retention of key structural elements of late-successional forests..." and with the LSR objective to "Develop/promote late-successional habitats (mature and old-growth forests) through silvicultural prescriptions in stands less than 80 years of age" (EA p. 10).

Trees marked for harvest in the Spencer Wallow Timber Sale are heavily weighted towards the smaller size classes, as is evident in Table DR-2 and Figure DR-1 below. As the table shows, 96% of the trees in the timber sale are less than 16" dbh and no trees are greater than 20" dbh. The result is that the remaining larger trees will be released, thereby promoting and retaining the large tree component as the BLM balances active management objectives with other multiple use objectives.

**Table DR-2. Diameter distribution of trees proposed for harvest**

DBH	Number of trees	Number of trees	Total Trees by DBH	Percent of Total Trees to be Harvested
	Cheney Slate	Deer Willy		
8	551	598	1,149	21%
10	755	521	1,276	23%
12	828	1,167	1,995	36%
14	380	517	897	16%
16	110	78	188	3%
18	22	22	44	0.8%
20	4	1	5	0.1%
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,650</b>	<b>2,904</b>	<b>5,554</b>	

**Figure DR-1. Diameter size class distribution of Spencer Wallow timber sale**



## B. Noncommercial Activities

Noncommercial activities include road maintenance, young stand management, habitat restoration and enhancement, fuel hazard reduction, recreation trail development and treatments in riparian reserves (Table DR-3). While there may be some commercial return from vegetation treatments under stewardship contracts and biomass extraction, units in this section are generally small diameter and will not produce adequate timber for a viable commercial timber sale. These treatments are generally the same for each action alternative with the exception of the acres of fuel hazard reduction and authorized uses for the Bolt Mountain Trail. Details of these treatments and the rationale for their implementation are discussed in the following sections.

<b>Treatment Type</b>	<b>Acres</b>
<b>Relocate road from riparian area</b>	<b>0.4 miles</b>
Young Stand Management	333
Habitat Restoration and Enhancement	592
Fuel Hazard Reduction (activity & natural fuels)	3,107
Recreation Trail Development	4.0 miles
Riparian Reserve Fuel Hazard Reduction (natural fuels)	1,150
Riparian Reserve Habitat Restoration and Enhancement	155
Riparian Reserve Young Stand Management	122

Please note that Table B-4 (EA pp. 197-200) showing noncommercial treatments, has errors in the formatting and the totals columns. The total non-harvest treatment acres in AMA/AMR is correct at 6,676 acres although the formatting makes this difficult to identify. The totals for non-harvest treatment acres (2,146) should be 2,371 acres, and the total for biomass utilization (2,084) under Alternative 2 should be 1,859 acres.

### **1. Roads** (EA pp. 20-21)

*Decision:* The decision is to implement the road maintenance and defer all road construction proposed in the EA. Under this decision, 136 miles of road will be maintained and no new roads would be constructed.

*Rationale:* Road maintenance is necessary to support the Cheney Slate LMP activities and to correct existing road conditions that are contributing to sediment delivery to streams. Roads that route surface flow to streams will be improved (EA p. 54).

### **2. Young Stand Management/Forest Development** (EA pp. 21-22)

*Decision:* Implement young stand treatments as proposed in all action alternatives (333 acres). Treatments would include brushing, pre-commercial thinning, and pruning outside of riparian reserves. Activity fuels would be treated for fuel hazard reduction based on hazard and resource

values in and adjacent to the stand. Not all acres will be treated for fuel hazard reduction. The most common slash treatment would be hand pile and burning (HP). Other treatments options include biomass utilization or removal of slash as poles or firewood. After young stands are treated in a given unit, fuel hazard will be assessed by an interdisciplinary team and planned fuel treatments may be modified to ensure that overall unit objectives are met. Any changes made to the fuel hazard reduction planned for a unit would be within the scope of the fuel treatment options assessed in the EA and their anticipated impacts. For a more complete description of post treatment fuel hazard evaluation, see section 4, below.

*Rationale:* Conifer plantations are experiencing intense competition from brush and hardwoods and need to be managed to reduce stand densities, promote species diversity, and maintain vigorous crowns. Surplus vegetation would be cut to accelerate growth, promote stand differentiation, and maintain the non-tanoak hardwood component for future stand diversity. Thinning and brushing in young stands will hasten the growth of desired trees (conifer and hardwood) to meet RMP determined, long-term forest product and habitat goals for the Adaptive Management Area land allocation, and in the selected areas of the riparian reserves and Adaptive Management Reserve to accelerate stand development for riparian and terrestrial habitat.

### **3. Fuel Hazard Reduction (EA pp. 22-24)**

*Decision:* The decision is to implement fuel hazard reduction as described in Alternative 2 for treatment of activity fuels and for all action alternatives for noncommercial treatments (EA Appendix B, Tables B-1 and B-4). The fuels treatments will be accomplished by a combination of slashing, underburning and handpile burning, depending on site specific conditions. All understory thinning done for fuel hazard reduction will be integrated into the silvicultural stand treatment objectives. Approximately 3,107 acres of natural fuels in the CAR and WUI would be treated. In addition, approximately 2,038 acres of natural and activity fuels would be treated (see EA pp. 197-200, Appendix B for specific unit treatments).

Approximately 1,342 acres of the treatment acres will be available for biomass utilization through ground-based systems and 1,394 acres utilizing cable based harvest systems (EA p. 24). Some of the vegetation treatments will produce special forest products that could be removed under stewardship contracts.

Actual acres treated will likely be less due to economic, safety and access limitations. In riparian areas and late-successional reserve, biomass removal would be limited to areas accessed by existing roads and skid trails. The purpose of these prescribed treatments is to reduce hazardous fuels, reduce smoke emissions and utilize the biomass to benefit the local economy. In areas where biomass extraction is not feasible, hand piling and burning would occur. Ground based methods would utilize existing skid trails whenever possible. When this is not possible, we will require the designation of skids trails, spaced approximately 75' apart.

Activity generated fuels will be evaluated using the BLM's Fuel Hazard/Risk Assessment and Treatment Recommendations analysis process after treatment and prior to fuel hazard reduction. This interdisciplinary review will ensure that the appropriate fuel reduction treatments are used to meet fuel hazard reduction, and other resource and safety objectives. Based on this review and analysis, proposed fuel treatments may be modified or dropped to achieve silvicultural or

resource protection objectives identified in the EA. Substantial changes to the proposed treatments are not anticipated. Those changes that are made will be consistent with the descriptions, overall extent, and impacts addressed in the EA and its range of fuel treatment alternatives. For example, hand piling/burning of slash will be used when underburning is not advisable, where high surface fuel loadings exist, or when underburning presents a significant risk to ecological processes, resource values, or private property and rural residences. Modified fuel treatments will be within the scope of overall effects anticipated and analyzed in the EA.

*Rationale:* Fuel treatments will reduce the chance of uncharacteristic fire behavior, protect communities from wildfire, improve access for fire suppression forces, and promote the Healthy Forest Initiative and National Fire Plan (2002), Jackson and Josephine Integrated Fire Plans (2004) and the Applegate Community Wildfire Protection Plan (2002). Fuel hazard reduction of existing and activity generated fuels are an important purpose of this project, especially in the rural interface. Reduced fuel loadings and altered fuel profiles will make fire suppression safer and more effective. Priority treatment areas include strategic areas in communities at risk and the wildland urban interface.

#### **4. Aquatic, Riparian, and Terrestrial habitats (EA pp.24-28)**

*Decision:* Vegetation treatments in the riparian reserves will be implemented as proposed for all action alternatives, and will include 592 acres of habitat restoration and enhancement (EA p. 26) on Adaptive Management Area and Adaptive Management Reserve lands and 155 acres in riparian reserves; fuel hazard reduction on 1,150 acres; and young stand management on 122 acres in riparian reserves. Treatments will also include road maintenance; stream crossing improvements; and large woody debris (LWD) and boulder placement along five miles of major fish-bearing streams. Existing snags and large down wood will be maintained, and prescriptions will designate leave trees for future large wood recruitment. Restoration Thinning (EA p. 25) will occur on 46 acres in riparian reserves. Consistent with wildlife objectives, treatments will include Riparian Diversity Patches (EA p. 26) to retain diversity in species and density.

Jeffrey pine savannahs and white oak woodlands will be treated to remove encroaching conifers and brush through manual and mechanical means, and burning.

*Rationale:* In the Lower Applegate watershed, the primary goal in riparian reserves is the maintenance and long term restoration of aquatic ecosystems as identified in the NWFP Aquatic Conservation Strategy (ACS) objectives. Using the ACS as a guide, objectives for treatments in the riparian reserve were developed (EA pp. 9-10; 24-25; Appendix F, pp. 214-218). Areas selected for riparian treatment lack structural complexity and species diversity, and are at risk of high intensity wildfire. The treatments are designed to enhance terrestrial and aquatic systems in both the short and long term by accelerating development of large conifers, promoting snag and down wood recruitment and reducing density in the Douglas-fir/tanoak series. Canopy closure would generally be retained at 60% although some areas may experience a short term reduction to 50%.

Fuel treatments in riparian reserves will decrease the risk of wildfires that burn hotter and more destructively than historically due to decades of fire exclusion and fuel buildup. The reintroduction of fire in riparian areas through prescribed burning will enhance wildlife habitat

and restore stands in the Jeffrey pine and white oak plant series to conditions consistent with a natural fire regime.

Road treatments will improve drainage and reduce the potential for delivery of fine sediment to fish habitat.

These treatments will help restore wildlife habitats in Jeffrey pine and white oak woodlands. These fire dependent ecosystems will be reinvigorated and restored through the reintroduction of low intensity fire; the removal of encroaching shade tolerant species; and the reduction of overly dense, declining chaparral.

#### **5. Noxious Weeds (EA p.28)**

*Decision:* The proposed treatment would reduce, control, contain, or eradicate species on BLM lands using the Oregon Department of Agriculture's State Noxious Weed List as a guide to determine species that should be treated. Noxious weeds would be treated using an integrated pest management approach (RMP p. 92) consisting of mechanical, biological, and chemical controls. Treatments will be made using appropriate methods based on species and conditions in accord with the direction of the Medford District Integrated Weed Management Plan (PA-OR110-98-14). Noxious weed sites would be treated prior to and following ground disturbing activity in the area, contingent on funding availability. All treated noxious weed populations would be monitored for treatment effectiveness, identification of newly established populations, and the need for further treatment.

*Rationale:* Noxious weeds have become established and have spread rapidly on private, county, state and federally owned lands. These species out-compete our native species for water, nutrients, and light which in turn crowds out and reduces populations of native species.

Noxious Weeds can:

- Increase fire risk
- Reduce plant diversity
- Displace native vegetation and wildlife
- Reduce land values
- Can be toxic to humans and animals
- Reduce crop yield and quality
- Degrade recreation areas

Treatment of noxious weeds will aid in maintaining native vegetation and plant diversity, decreasing fire risk and reducing degradation of recreation and riparian areas as well as other wildlife and plant habitats. Detecting noxious weed sites early and rapidly treating them decreases the chance for new populations becoming established, and increases the chance to eradicate noxious weed species from the area.

## **6. Socioeconomic/human uses (EA pp.28-29)**

Four human use issues, trail construction, management of OHV use, illegal dumping and Special Forest Products will be discussed in this section, as related to the purpose and need (EA pp. 2-3), and objectives for socioeconomics (EA p. 11) identified in the Cheney Slate EA.

### Trail Construction

*Decision:* The decision is to implement the recreation actions as proposed in the EA for Alternative 4. A trail system would be constructed on Bolt Mountain and would be open for hiking, horseback riding and mountain biking. Access and parking would be at Fish Hatchery Park, on the north side of the Applegate River, just south of Bolt Mountain. The Bolt Mountain Trail would travel approximately 4 miles north to Bolt Mountain and its associated ridges.

*Rationale:* Population increase has created the need for more recreation opportunities on public lands. Recreation improvements would benefit the local and regional communities by providing several miles of developed trail system for hiking and interpretive opportunities. Timing of implementation of this work will be dependent on funding, and Resource Area and District priorities.

### Management of current OHV use

*Decision:* Existing user-created OHV trails in the Elliot Creek area that are steeper than 55% grade would be rehabilitated by decompacting the surface and building water bars and drainage dips. Cut vegetation would be pulled back into the trail as it is available from stewardship and fuels reduction projects to both block these steep, eroding trails and to catch sediment that channels down these trails. Native vegetation would be utilized where needed to reseed and stabilize the soil.

*Rationale:* Trails that are steeper than 55% grade are showing excessive erosion and sedimentation. Blocking these trails would reduce sedimentation and prevent further degradation from unauthorized OHV use. While we realize the difficulty of blocking trails to unauthorized uses, we feel that a concerted effort to block trails and public education outreach should decrease unauthorized uses and reduce resource damage. As an example, recent work with landowners in the Rogue River corridor has already reduced some unauthorized uses.

### Detection and clean-up of illegal dumpsites

*Decision:* A neighborhood watch program would be developed within the project area. This program would establish partnerships with the neighbors, interest groups and individuals to patrol and clean up dumpsites within the project area. The identified areas would also be signed as a neighborhood watch area to deter further dumping.

*Rationale:* Illegal dumping on public lands degrades resource values and potentially causes pollution from toxic materials, leading to hazards for humans and animals, and pollution of waterways. The BLM has already partnered with residents in the Lower Applegate Watershed to clean up some dumpsites, and coordinates with land owners to maintain locked and repaired gates.

### Special Forest Products (EA p. 29)

*Decision:* Implement special forest products work as proposed. Special forest product gathering or harvesting will be consistent with and promote stand treatment objectives. Scheduling of special forest product collection will be coordinated with other project activities. All units proposed for harvest, fuel hazard reduction or young stand treatment will be available for special forest products and small sales (e.g., poles, merchantable trees, fuel wood, burls), as appropriate to meet resource objectives and responsible use of these uses. While some commercial product may be realized through stewardship and biomass utilization, the treatments will not harvest enough trees to make for an economically viable timber sale.

*Rationale:* There is an ever increasing demand for a wide range of forest products for personal and commercial use. Incorporating special forest product harvest into forest stand treatments will provide forest products and meet stand objectives. In some instances, special forest product collection or stewardship contracting may be the best strategy to accomplish management objectives. Providing these opportunities will also contribute to the local economy.

### **VRM (EA pp. 37-38 & 170): Proposed Mitigation Measure #1**

*Decision:* While some of the activities proposed in these units will not be implemented in this decision, this decision addresses the mitigation measure. Implement Proposed Mitigation Measure #1 to meet VRM III objectives by changing the prescription from regeneration harvest to density management in units 28-001, 29-001, 7-002 and 12-001.

*Rationale:* Regeneration harvest would create large openings and have the most visual effect on the landscape. Browns would increase as the ground would be visible until vegetation became re-established. Where visible from Key Observation Points (KOPs), openings would dominate the view of the landscape. The characteristic lines and forms would be discontinuous. Many of these units are proposed in dense, homogenous stands, and the openings would not match the characteristic landscape. Changes to the landscape at KOP #1 and KOP #6 would be moderate to strong, due to the low number of trees remaining in the stands (approximately 10%) and the low percentage of crown of remaining trees (about 27%). Regeneration harvest in stands visible from these KOPs would not meet VRM III objectives.

The modifications to treatments as proposed in mitigation measure #1 would meet VRM III objectives. Stands will blend in with the characteristic landscape since the crown area of the remaining overstory would be over 40% versus 25-35%, and some multi-layered canopy would remain providing more greens and rough texture. Therefore, density management would meet VRM III objectives in units 28-001, 29-001, 7-002 and 12-001.

## **C. BLM Strategic Plan**

The Decision will implement a range of activities that will promote a number of the goals of the BLM's Strategic Plan for FY2003-2008:

*Resource Protection-Goals 1 & 3: Protect Cultural and Natural Heritage Resources;  
Improve Health of Watersheds and Landscapes (Restore Fire Adapted Ecosystems)*

This project will protect and in some cases enhance cultural resources through project design features, reduced fire hazard, and interpretation. Wildlife habitat improvements will restore Jeffrey pine savannahs, white oak habitats and ultramafic plant associations.

*Resource Use-Goal 4: Manage or Influence Resources to Enhance Public Benefit, Promote Responsible Use, and Ensure Optimal Value*

Implementation of Alternative 2 will contribute approximately 561 thousand board feet (mbf) of timber to local and regional economies. Timber harvest prescriptions are designed to enhance forest productivity and provide for timber harvest opportunities into the future (EA pp. 5-7).

*Serving Communities-Goal 1: Protect Lives, Resources, and Property*

Implementation of Alternative 2 will reduce fuel loadings and stand densities, moving them closer to historical levels and normal ranges. All areas to be thinned include fuel hazard reduction to protect resources, homes and property. In some areas of the Cheney Slate LMP, fuel hazard reduction is the primary objective. Fire behavior and suppression difficulties experienced in recent fires in southwest Oregon (e.g., the 500,000 acre Biscuit fire) clearly demonstrate that fuel hazard needs to be addressed to reduce threats to public health, safety and property.

**E. National Fire Plan**

The National Fire Plan, a culmination of various reports, (Managing the Impacts of Wildfires on Communities and the Environment, Integrating Fire and Natural Resource Management – A Cohesive Strategy for Protecting People by Restoring Land Health), budget requests, Congressional direction, and resulting strategies, plans, projects, and other activities has set the stage and provided direction for an increased application and management of prescribed fire and other fuel treatments on federally managed lands. This is further reinforced by the 1995 Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy along with its accompanying 2001 review and update.

Cheney Slate LMP includes the National Fire Plan designated Murphy and Wilderville Community at Risk (CAR). Consequently, regional and national attention is focused on these areas as wildland / urban interface communities in the vicinity of federal lands that are at high risk from wildfire. This emphasis extends 1½ miles beyond the CAR which is also identified as a wildland-urban interface (WUI).

Much of the project area has high risk fire regimes and is classified as fire condition classes 2 and 3 under the Department of the Interior's "Cohesive Strategy." The fire regimes in these fire condition classes have been moderately to significantly altered from their historical range of fire frequency. To restore them to their historical fire regimes, these lands require some level of restoration through mechanical and prescribed fire treatments (Integrating Fire and Natural Resource Management – A Cohesive Strategy for Protecting People by Restoring Land Health, DOI, March 2001 Draft). The Cheney Slate LMP includes a range of management actions directed at restoration and at reducing the high wildfire risk on federal lands.

#### IV. CONSULTATION AND COORDINATION

Pursuant to the Endangered Species Act (ESA), BLM completed consultation with the US Fish and Wildlife Service for the activities addressed in this decision. Other activities, particularly the commercial timber harvest, are not covered under current consultation and these activities will be deferred in this decision. There may be other decisions in the future that would authorize these activities.

In 2007, BLM prepared a BA to evaluate impacts to Northern Spotted Owls and critical habitat.. In September 2007 the USFWS gave BLM a letter of concurrence (LOC) regarding fuel hazard reduction (Tails # 13420-2007-I-0231) and in May 2009 for thinning and stewardship activities (Tails #1342-2009-I-0093). These LOCs cover the Spencer Wallow Timber Sale units and other Not Likely to Adversely Affect stewardship units in the Cheney Slate LMP.

After the EA was released, the USFWS rescinded the 2008 Critical Habitat Unit changes, and T37S-R06W-section 23 reverted back to within CHU. Actions in this decision are all treat and maintain, noncommercial treatments; therefore, there will be no adverse modifications to the CHU under either of the CHU designations.

In accordance with section 7 of the ESA, the BLM analyzed project activities for their potential to affect to the following plant species; the endangered Gentner's fritillary (*Fritillaria gentneri*) endangered Cook's lomatium (*Lomatium cookii*), endangered large-flowered woolly meadowfoam (*Limnanthes floccosa ssp. grandiflora*), and McDonald's rockcress (*Arabis macdonaldiana*). In September 2008, BLM prepared a BA to evaluate impacts to listed plant species and to reinitiate consultation on all acres unsold in the Fiscal Year 2006-2008 timber sale plan, which included the Cheney Slate LMP. In September 2008 the USFWS gave BLM a letter of concurrence (LOC) (Tails # 13420-2008-I-0136). The BLM is implementing all applicable PDCs in accordance with the mandatory terms and conditions as specified in the LOC. The Service stated that the proposed action will not jeopardize the continued existence of ESA listed species.

In accordance with section 7 of the ESA, the BLM analyzed project activities for their potential to affect Southern Oregon/Northern California (SONC) coho salmon or their designated critical habitat. The BLM also analyzed these activities for their potential to affect Essential Fish Habitat (EFH), in accordance with the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (MSA). Noncommercial activities (e.g., fuel hazard reduction, young stand thinning, and road maintenance) that are not being proposed as part of a timber sale were included under the consultation previously completed for programmatic activities (NMFS, Northwest Region, August 8, 2001, as amended October 18, 2002 and May 21, 2003). Commercial harvest and associated activities that are not included in the programmatic consultation are currently undergoing consultation with the National Marine Fisheries Service. All actions in this decision are No Affect for SONC.

The project will not adversely impact any sites of cultural or historical significance. The State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) was informed of the BLM's finding in accordance with 36 CFR 800.5(b).

The Confederated Tribes of the Siletz and the Grande Ronde were notified of this project during scoping and the EA's public comment period. Josephine County Commissioners and the Josephine County forestry department were also contacted. No responses were received.

## **V. PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT**

The BLM extended an invitation to the local and regional communities, Native American tribes and other state and federal agencies, private organizations and individuals to develop issues and resources important to local, state, national, and international economies.

Public involvement began in May 2007, with a scoping letter being sent to approximately 3,700 residents and landowners near or adjacent to BLM parcels within the planning area, to federal, state, and county agencies, and to tribal and private organizations and individuals that requested information concerning projects of this type.

The BLM held a series of public meetings (and information was gathered through questionnaires, personal discussions, and comment letters, which provided public input to BLM for consideration in the EA (See EA pp. 173 for details on the public involvement process for this EA). Alternatives 3 and 4 were developed to address scoping comments from the communities: Alternative 3 restricted harvest to exclude any regeneration harvest and Alternative 4 restricted harvest to stands that had been previously entered for timber harvest.

The public comment period for review of the Cheney Slate LMP EA was initiated on July 7, 2009 for a 30 day comment period. Approximately 445 letters were sent to individuals, groups and agencies that requested that they be kept informed of the project. The letter provided a synopsis of the proposed actions, stated that the EA was available on line or from the Grants Pass Interagency Office, and announced the 30-day public comment period. A legal ad (Notice of Availability) was published in the Grants Pass Daily Courier on July 7, 2009. Eleven comment letters and approximately 100 form letters were received in response to these public outreach efforts. Public comments and associated BLM responses are summarized in Appendix B.

## **VI. CONCLUSION**

### **A. Plan Consistency**

Based on the information in the Cheney Slate landscape Management Project's EA, in the record, and from the letters and comments received from the public about the project, I conclude that this decision is consistent with the:

1. Final EIS and ROD for the 1995 Medford District Resource Management Plan (RMP) (1995)
2. Final Supplemental EIS on Management of Habitat for Late-Successional and Old-Growth Forest Related Species within the Range of the Northern Spotted Owl (1994)
3. ROD for Amendments to Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management Planning Documents Within the Range of the Northern Spotted Owl and its attachment A entitled the

- Standards and Guidelines for Management of Habitat for Late-Successional and Old-Growth Forest Related Species Within the Range of the Northern Spotted Owl (NWFP) (1994)
4. Final SEIS for Amendment to the Survey & Manage, Protection Buffer, and other Mitigation Measures Standards and Guidelines (2000), and the ROD and Standards and Guidelines for Amendment to the Survey & Manage, Protection Buffer, and other Mitigation Measures Standards and Guidelines (2001)
  5. Medford District Noxious Weed Environmental Assessment (1998)
  6. ROD for Management of Port-Orford Cedar in Southwest Oregon (2004)

On July 25, 2007, the Under Secretary of the Department of Interior signed a new Survey and Manage Record of Decision that removed the survey and manage requirements from all of the BLM resource management plans (RMPs) within the range of the Northern Spotted Owl. The Medford District has complied with the 2007 ROD. In addition, for this project the District has elected to complete pre-disturbance surveys for former Survey and Manage species consistent with the 2001 Survey and Manage Record of Decision, including subsequent 2001 through 2003 annual species reviews.

The ACS Consistency Review (EA pp. 104-109) found that the project is in compliance with the Aquatic Conservation Strategy as originally developed under the Northwest Forest Plan.

This decision is also consistent with the Endangered Species Act; the Native American Religious Freedom Act; other cultural resource management laws and regulations; Executive Order 12898 regarding Environmental Justice; and Executive Order 13212 regarding potential adverse impacts to energy development, production, supply and/or distribution.

This decision will not have any adverse impacts to energy development, production, supply and/or distribution (per Executive Order 13212).

This document complies with the Council on Environmental Quality's (CEQ) Regulations for Implementing the Procedural Provisions of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA; 40 CFR Parts 1500-1508) and the Department of the Interior's regulations on the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (43 CFR Part 46) as well as the BLM specific NEPA requirements in the Departmental Manual (516 DM 11).

## **VII. ADMINISTRATIVE REMEDIES**

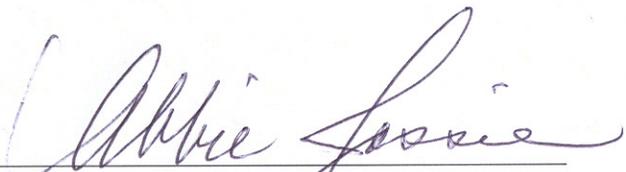
This decision is a forest management decision. Administrative remedies are available to those who believe that they will be adversely affected by this Decision. Administrative recourse is available in accordance with BLM regulations and must follow the procedures and requirements described in 43 CFR § 5003 - Administrative Remedies.

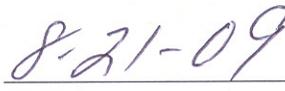
In accordance with the BLM Forest Management Regulations 43 CFR § 5003.2(a&b), the effective date of this decision, as it relates to an advertised timber sale, will be when the first notice of sale appears in the Grants Pass Daily Courier. Publication of the first notice of sale establishes the effective date of the decision for those portions of this decision record included in

the timber sale and timber sale prospectus. The effective date of this decision establishes the date initiating the protest period provided for in accordance with 43 CFR § 5003.3.

In accordance with the BLM Forest Management Regulation 43 CFR § 5003.2 (a&c), the effective date of this decision, as it pertains to actions which are not part of an advertised timber sale, will be the date of publication of the notice of decision in the Grants Pass Daily Courier. Publication of this notice establishes the date initiating the protest period provided for in accordance with 43 CFR § 5003.3. While similar notices may be published in other newspapers, the Grants Pass Daily Courier publication date will prevail as the effective date of this decision.

Any contest of this decision should state specifically which part of the decision is being protested and cite the applicable CFR regulations.

  
Abbie Jossie  
Field Manager, Grants Pass Resource Area  
Medford District, Bureau of Land Management

  
Date

## APPENDIX A. TREATMENT UNITS AND PRESCRIPTION

UNIT	ACRES	PRESCRIPTION
*37S-06W-21-008A	6	Restoration Thinning
*37S-06W-7-001A	36	DM / UR
*37S-07W-13-009A	12	DM / ModGS
*37S-07W-19-002	16	DM / UR
*37S-07W-19-003	28	DM / UR
*37S-07W-19-004	33	DM / UR
37S-06W-21-008B	10	Restoration Thinning
38S-06W-11-007	26	Variable Density Commercial Thin
38S-06W-14-023	8	Variable Density Commercial Thin
38S-06W-23-004	17	Variable Density Commercial Thin
36S-07W-25-003	28	DM / UR
37S-04W-21-022	10	DM / UR
37S-04W-21-023	10	DM / UR
37S-04W-31-002	182	DM / UR
37S-05W-23-008	31	DM / UR
37S-05W-23-012	24	DM / UR
37S-05W-23-015	25	DM / UR
37S-06W-25-001	40	Restoration Thinning
37S-06W-7-001B	41	DM / UR
37S-06W-7-004	24	DM / UR
37S-07W-13-008	48	Hardwood Conversion
37S-07W-13-009B	24	DM / ModGS
37S-07W-15-001	153	DM / UR
37S-07W-15-002	39	DM / UR
37S-07W-15-017	9	DM / UR
37S-07W-19-016	27	DM / ModGS
37S-07W-23-007	14	Hardwood Conversion
37S-07W-5-007	20	DM / UR
38S-06W-11-011	14	Variable Density Commercial Thin
38S-06W-13-002	6	Variable Density Commercial Thin
38S-06W-13-006	29	Variable Density Commercial Thin
38S-06W-13-019	15	Variable Density Commercial Thin
38S-06W-14-006	16	Variable Density Commercial Thin
38S-06W-14-008	43	Variable Density Commercial Thin
38S-06W-14-014	45	Variable Density Commercial Thin
38S-06W-15-011	32	Variable Density Commercial Thin
38S-06W-15-015	17	Variable Density Commercial Thin
38S-06W-22-011	5	Variable Density Commercial Thin

\* Prescriptions in these units will be modified to maintain 60% canopy

## **APPENDIX B. PUBLIC COMMENT SUMMARY AND RESPONSE**

The formal public comment period for the Cheney Slate Landscape Management Project's EA was held from July 7 through August 6, 2009. The public was notified of these comment opportunities via newspaper notices and letters to 200 individuals, Tribes, organizations and government entities. Eleven comment letters and approximately 100 form letters were received in response to these public outreach efforts.

Some of the issues described within the letters included general topics of concern such as, old growth management, watershed effects and Riparian Reserve management. Most were not specific about this project but concerned about federal forest management in general. The following is a synopsis of the key or primary issues and concerns raised in the comment letters received by the BLM.

### **1. Purpose and Need for Fuel Hazard Reduction**

**Response:** The EA disclosed that fire hazard would increase for several decades in regeneration harvest units (EA p. 94). The findings are consistent with the RMP EIS (p. 4-120) which identified regeneration harvest as generating flammable debris. Please note that regeneration harvest retains a minimum of 6-8 large trees per acre, and in 70% of units in this project, retains 16-25 of the largest trees per acre (EA p. 18; RMP p. 73), while clearcuts do not retain any merchantable trees. Clearcuts are not proposed in this project, nor are they authorized under the RMP.

The EA acknowledged that with regeneration harvest, and along with past and anticipated treatments, the potential for a high severity fire would remain high across the watershed due to the level of untreated acres. However, the EA concluded that proposed fire hazard reduction treatments "would return 8,577 acres of the project area to near historical ranges of fuel loadings, Canopy Base Height and Canopy Bulk Density, [resulting] in a reduction to fire hazard, and reduced chance of loss of values at risk on up to 32% of the project area (p. 97). Therefore, the proposed actions reduce fuel hazard across the planning area, meeting the purpose and need to reduce hazardous fuels (EA pp. 7-9).

#### **1. a. Threats to Public Safety require an EIS**

**Response:** While there is an acknowledged potential for a high severity fire across the watershed, this is primarily a result of untreated areas plus an increase in hazard on the 545 acres proposed for regeneration harvest (none in this decision).

The EA disclosed that fire hazard would increase for several decades in regeneration harvest units (EA p. 94). The findings are consistent with the RMP EIS (p. 4-120) which identified regeneration harvest as generating flammable debris.

The project has not been identified as having the potential to significantly and adversely impact public health or safety. Fuel hazard reduction will benefit public health and safety, particularly in CARs and WUIs (EA pp. 93-98). The EA concluded that proposed fire hazard reduction

treatments “would return 8,577 acres of the project area to near historical ranges of fuel loadings, Canopy Base Height and Canopy Bulk Density, [resulting] in a reduction to fire hazard, and reduced chance of loss of values at risk on up to 32% of the project area (p. 97).

There is no controversy regarding the impacts associated with harvest and fuels reduction. The EA disclosed that fire hazard could increase for several decades in regeneration harvest units (EA p. 94). The findings are consistent with the RMP EIS (p. 4-120) which identified regeneration harvest as generating flammable debris. Similarly, the analysis did not show that this action will involve any unique or unknown risks.

Based on the reduction in fuel hazard, and consistent with objectives of increasing safety for resources and humans (RMP pp. 88-89), the disclosure that fuel hazard would increase in regeneration harvests, and no unique or unknown risks, an EA is appropriate and an EIS is not necessary.

## **2. Riparian Reserves, Watershed Analysis, ACS, & NWF**

**Response:** NWF Standards and Guidelines identify appropriate objectives for treatments within Riparian Reserves, including stocking control, re-establishment and management of stands, and promoting desired vegetation characteristics. Therefore, vegetation treatment prescriptions in the riparian reserve were developed to meet objectives for ecosystem function that are outlined in the Aquatic Conservation Strategy assessment (EA p.104-109) of the Northwest Forest Plan.

As recommended in the Cheney-Slate, Slate, and Murphy watershed analyses and supported by field surveys and fuel models, thinning and fuel reduction in Riparian Reserves are warranted to reduce stocking, increase stand resiliency, and improve riparian conditions for large wood recruitment and use as wildlife migration corridors. While Watershed Analysis is an analytical process and not a decision making process (RMP p. 96), numerous recommendations from these Watershed Analyses were carried over into the EA.

Recommendations highlighted in the Watershed Analysis for riparian reserves addressed in this project are included in the EA. “The Watershed Analysis recommendations support the management of vegetation and conditions inside riparian reserves to promote the objectives of the ACS, and the use of thinning, prescribed fire or mechanical treatments to reduce fuels (USDI 1996, 2000). Actions carried over from the Watershed Analysis include using prescribed fire, improving instream complexity with the addition of key pieces of wood, decreasing stream crossings, thinning to accelerate growth of large trees, maintain older forests for connectivity, rerouting of a road from riparian habitat, cleaning up of illegal dump sites, as well as other activities (EA pp. 105-106). Clean up of dump sites is an ongoing activity for BLM and occurs on an as needed basis.

“The proposed harvest treatment is density management thinning in the riparian reserves to accelerate the development of late-successional forest conditions. There would be no reduction in streamside shade or large instream wood recruitment because only smaller diameter trees would be cut, and the larger ones that provide the shaded canopy in the reserves, and the best

recruits for future large wood would be left in place... The use of these PDFs in treatments conducted in riparian reserves would protect water quality by maintaining the shade necessary to avoid raising water temperatures in the stream segments passing through BLM lands” (EA p. 100).

Thinning in the Riparian Reserve would meet the stated objectives in the EA and comply with direction in the NWFP for riparian treatments (EA 104). Consistent with the direction in the NWFP for riparian treatments the analysis concluded that riparian reserve treatments would eventually result in late-successional forest conditions with increased structural diversity, canopy, and large woody debris recruitment, and occurring at a faster rate than under the No Action alternative (EA p.100).

The two proposed riparian treatments (Riparian Habitat Enhancement and Riparian Diversity Patches) in the Cheney Slate EA (p. 26) are specifically designed to improve the health of riparian areas, and promote the growth and attainment of late-successional forest conditions at a more rapid pace than if these areas were left untreated. Specifically:

“*[Riparian]* vegetation treatments would be based on local stand / vegetation conditions and are proposed where late-successional characteristics and conditions **would not be promoted or protected within the riparian reserve if left untreated**. This process is designed to move the riparian reserve toward the desired future condition, benefit aquatic systems and be consistent with the ACS (RMP pp. 22, 154) (EA p. 25). The Riparian Habitat Enhancement prescription focuses, “...on retaining the most vigorous dominant and co-dominant overstory trees” (EA pg 26).

In addition, to help meet ACS objectives, if the riparian area is below desired levels in coarse wood, “...riparian trees would be girdled or felled toward the stream using chain saws. Trees targeted for selection would be from the understory to maintain primary shade to the creek. These riparian reaches currently have fully stocked riparian zones, many dominated by small diameter trees, and lack large overstory trees as well as large instream woody structure. Stream reaches in the Cheney Slate project area would be treated when surveys indicate that addition of instream wood could promote properly functioning channel conditions.” (EA pg 27).

“BLM resource specialists developed a decision flow chart to assess riparian condition, and offer guidance and rationale for what thinning treatment, if any, would be proposed in riparian reserves found throughout the project area (See Flow Chart, Appendix F). The flow chart was also developed to assist resource specialists to develop prescriptions that support attaining Aquatic Conservation Strategy (ACS) objectives (RMP pp. 22, 154).”

The following is an excerpt from the EA regarding the decision flow chart developed to assess riparian condition and provide guidance on proposed thinning treatments:

The flow chart was developed to have a repeatable, systematic approach where each Riparian Reserve could be evaluated under the same criteria. The goal of the Riparian Reserve treatments is to advance ACS objectives if they were determined to not be properly functioning. If the Riparian Reserve was deemed as properly functioning after an evaluation using the BLM

flowchart, then no treatment was recommended. For example, under the flowchart rationale found on page 216 of the EA:

*“Decision 3 – Is the dominant size of trees in the riparian reserve >21” DBH?”*

Large diameter trees are important features of mature and old-growth forests, and for the species that depend on these forest types. Additionally, as large diameter trees die, they continue to function and provide critical habitat features to a variety of wildlife species in the form of snags and coarse woody material (CWM). These trees can also be recruited into stream channels during flood events and provide important components for fish and riparian associated species.

This decision point is designed to separate out those riparian reserves that currently contain enough large diameter trees to be considered a mature or old-growth stand (in terms of tree size only). Riparian reserves that do not have a dominant tree size of >21” DBH are stands that are generally not mature or old-growth.

If the given riparian reserve has a dominant tree size of >21” DBH, it is assumed that the trees in the stand are currently large enough to contribute functionally. Commercial treatments are not recommend in these stands, as the average tree size already meets or exceeds the target for a functioning late-successional riparian reserve (in terms of tree size only). RR with a dominant tree size of >21” DBH has already achieved the desired condition in terms of tree size only.

If the given riparian reserve does not have a dominant tree size of >21” DBH, there is possibility to commercially thin the riparian reserve in order to accelerate the growth rate of the remaining trees within the riparian reserve. Where thinning is proposed, the canopy closure must be maintained at  $\geq 40\%$  in order to maintain for spotted owl dispersal (averaged across the treatment area).”

The prescription clearly states , “All trees showing old-growth characteristics (e.g., diameter >30” dbh, large limbs, broken tops) would be retained.” (EA pg. 26).

**2. a. Erosion and Sedimentation, and Riparian Buffers**

The no treatment buffers of 50 feet for perennial streams and 25 feet for intermittent streams is not the only protection for stream integrity or to prevent sediment from reaching streams. The entire riparian reserved width, which includes the no treatment buffer plus riparian reserve totals 330’ for fish-bearing streams and 165’ for non-fish bearing streams, and help to ameliorate potential effects. The Riparian Habitat Enhancement and Riparian Diversity Patches prescriptions limits treatment within riparian reserves to activities intended to help achieve ACS objectives and enhance habitat diversity (EA p. 26). A series of project design features also provide further protection for riparian areas, including use of existing skid trails (EA p. 31); no construction of skid trails within 100’ of perennial streams; winterizing of skid trails needed for more than one season (EA p. 30); and limiting ground based extraction to existing skid trails and roads (EA p. 35).

While turbidity is expected to increase in the first year following activity, there are no expected alterations to channel form or to channel processes such as floodplain connectivity, stream flow velocity, or pool and bar formation (EA p. 55). While there is some expected increase in localized erosion (EA p. 5), soil loss is expected to be slight “because erosion rarely occurs uniformly in a forested watershed as surface erosion depends primarily on extent and continuity of bare areas.” (EA p. 55). The prescriptions and PDFs as outlined above are intended to minimize the extent and continuity of bare areas to prevent sediment routing mechanisms to streams.

The potential delivery of water and sediment from compacted surfaces to the stream network is low, with the possible exception of temporary stream crossings. An increase in potential surface erosion might result from compacted surfaces that may pond and route water during heavy rainstorm events. However, with PDFs of slope limitation, approved trail location and water barring, erosion would be minimized. Importantly, with riparian protection buffers, slope limitations and no routing mechanism to the creek, compacted surfaces would not create off-site impacts. There would be no additional loss of productivity from erosion since erosion would occur on compacted surfaces already identified as areas with reduced productivity (EA p. 59).

Longer term sedimentation is not expected due to site rehabilitation (i.e.: skid trail decommissioning, ditch cleaning, etc.) ... The channels would maintain themselves regardless of activity because there would be little to no sedimentation increase in the streams to push a channel’s water and bedload ratio out of its natural balance. There would be no alteration to sedimentation processes that would create chronic adverse water quality or channel conditions.” (pg 55)

A wide variety of project design features are incorporated into project implementation to reduce the potential for sedimentation and soil compaction. These include limiting yarding tractors to the smallest size necessary; tractors would utilize one end log suspension during skidding and would be restricted to approved skid trails; would be restricted to slopes <35% and limited by soil moisture content (EA p. 31).

### *2. a. Soil Compaction and Cumulative Effects*

Biomass extraction and treatments within riparian reserves (Riparian Habitat Enhancement) are designed to reduce density in overstocked stands and create diversity. While this will entail some entry by heavy equipment, the hydrology analysis in the EA concluded that there would be no long term effects on compaction or sedimentation, specifically referring to research within the Applegate Adaptive Management Area:

...Amaranthus and Steinfeld (1997)...found that in the Applegate Management area, soil bulk densities are lower and organic matter higher in later successional forests adjacent to dense pole stands. Thinning prescriptions that promote late-successional structure could help decrease soil bulk densities and increase soil organic matter over time. The Forest Service’s North American Long-term Soil Productivity experiment noted that soils with initially high bulk densities could not be compacted much further (Powers et al, 2005).

Therefore, there is an inherent protection against drastically increasing soil compaction in the areas most in need of treatment. In addition, Amaranthus and Steinfeld observed that much of the litter layer on skid trails remained intact after the first three trips. By the sixth trip, 1/3 to 1/2 of the skid trail area had some mixing of litter with exposed mineral soil at which point soil productivity begins to decline. (pg 58)

Additionally, with the small scale of treatments spread out across the project area, riparian buffers and other project design features to prevent sediment routing mechanisms to streams, potential effects are expected to be low and/or short term (EA pp. 58-64), and no long term loss of productivity is expected ( EA p. 59).

### **3. Late-Successional Habitat**

**Response:** Currently 9,434 acres (24%) of federal land within the Lower Applegate River 5<sup>th</sup> field watershed classifies as late successional forest (EA p. 124). There are 7,461 acres of BLM lands classified as late-successional habitat in the watershed. This decision defers all regeneration harvest, hardwood conversion, and other treatments that would either downgrade spotted owl (late-successional) habitat or have an effect on the threatened Southern Oregon/Northern California coho salmon. Therefore, under this decision, all late-successional habitat will be retained. Because of the small scale of treatments spread across the watershed, this project would maintain well-distributed late-successional habitat outside of reserves, consistent with the RMP (EA p. 20; RMP p. 36). Approximately 5,155 acres of late-successional habitat on BLM lands within the project area would not receive any treatment. Additional acres of late-successional habitat, beyond the 5,155 acres listed above as no treatment, would also be retained in red tree vole and riparian buffers (EA p. 133), consistent with the objectives to, “improve forest ecosystem health, function, diversity, and resiliency” (EA p. 9). All vegetation treatments are “treat and maintain” by maintaining a minimum 60% canopy in suitable spotted owl habitat, and retaining key habitat characteristics within that habitat (EA p.130).

In this decision, there would be no downgrading of habitat and therefore, no reduction in late-successional forest habitat.

Three action alternatives were analyzed in detail for the project. All of the alternatives analyzed are within the guidelines of the AMA. Differences between the alternatives are reflected mainly in the timber sale and riparian management portions of the project, and address different approaches to meeting objectives for harvest of commercial timber and riparian reserve treatments as outlined in Section 1.3 above. Road construction also varies depending on needs for commercial timber harvest. Alternative 2 focuses on producing the maximum amount of timber from the project area, utilizing tractor and cable harvest systems to make the units more economical; Alternative 3 emphasizes low impact (i.e., aerial harvest systems and thinning rather than regeneration harvest) approaches to forest harvest and vegetation management, specifically to address AMA objectives for low impact harvest methods ; and Alternative 4 precludes harvest in stands greater than 80 years old that have not been previously entered for commercial timber harvest (EA p. 15).

Under the 1995 RMP, Matrix lands in the Medford District are divided into the Northern General Forest Management Area (NGFMA) and the Southern General Forest Management Area (SGFMA). The Southern General Forest Management Area requires retention of 16 to 25 large conifer trees per acre for Regeneration Harvest prescribed stands in the project. The project is in the SGFMA; however, there are “local situations in the northern GFMA that should be managed along SGFMA prescription guidelines and vice versa” (Medford District RMP ROD, p 73). The NGFMA retention level of 9-16 large trees per acre is utilized where competition from tanoak is preventing conifer development and growth. The units proposed for the NGFMA retention levels, “currently have canopy closures too high to successfully regenerate with conifers without additional overstory removal, so a NGFMA prescription is more appropriate.” This is supported by research: “Birch and Johnson (1992), Acker et al. (1998), and Zenner et al. (1998) report decline in understory (seedling) growth from retaining green trees in the overstory; thus the NGFMA prescription is recommended to address this issue on these productive sites of the project area.” (EA p. 18). While there is no Regeneration harvest under this decision, a future decision may determine that regeneration harvest at this level is appropriate to meet project objectives.

### **3.a. Peak Flow Analysis**

This response clarifies the hydrologic peak flow analysis summary regarding the Riparian Diversity Patch prescription. The statement “*no overstory canopy removal within riparian reserves*”, appears in the hydrological analysis summary conclusions and should be considered within the context of that analysis. Specifically, it refers to the fact that no canopy would be removed that contributes to stream shade, and therefore there would be no increase in stream temperatures. The statement “the EA indicates that regeneration harvest (not RDP) is the only prescription that “creates openings” is made within the context of a discussion around peak flows. It’s not so much that regeneration harvest is the only prescription that creates openings, but rather that the regeneration harvest prescription is the only treatment that has the potential to affect peak flows because it is the only prescription that produces openings on a landscape level large enough to cause an increase in peak flows, and the low elevation areas proposed for the RDP prescription are not within the Transient Snow Zone. Only, “138 acres of Regeneration Harvest, 314 acres of Variable Density Commercial Thin and 201 acres of Density Management [are proposed] in the Transient Snow Zone, where “rain-on-snow” events can cause peak flow increases” (EA p. 59). This is why the RDP prescription is not addressed in the discussion on peak flow.

Note that we do not rely on riparian reserves as a mitigation measure. Disclosing of information that is appropriate at the scale of analysis, the wildlife biologist’s conclusion was that, along with the relatively small scale of treatments across the 90,600 acre watershed, “late-successional forest habitat would be maintained throughout the watershed in Riparian Reserves, 100-acre KSOACs, and 15% late-successional forest retention, which would further reduce potential impacts to spotted owls within the Lower Applegate 5<sup>th</sup> field watershed.” (EA p. 155)

#### **4. Roads:**

**Response:** The EA (p. 54) disclosed short term input of sediment to stream channels from road maintenance; however, consistent with research, the analysis found that sediment production from forest roads would decline substantially with time. Under the No Action (EA p. 53) the analysis found that, with no maintenance, roads would remain inadequately surfaced and continue to have drainage problems such as ditch line scour and roadbed erosion. While some road maintenance has occurred in the project area under regular BLM maintenance schedules (NEPA Document # DOI-BLM-OR-MOOO-2009-0008-CX), because of lack of routing mechanisms to creeks (EA pp. 101, 102, 103, 109), only minimal turbidity increases are expected, but only in the first year following treatment, and no alterations to channel form or processes are expected (EA p. 55). As the increases would be inconsequential compared to background levels (EA p.54), increases in turbidity could not be differentiated from background levels and therefore, not measurable. As disclosed in the EA: “The short term inputs from maintenance may create isolated pockets of fine sediment deposition immediately below culverts (5-100 feet). During high flows, the introduced sediment will become an immeasurable fraction of the system sediment load; it would not be detectable at downstream locations. A long term reduction in sedimentation and improved flow routing would be expected following road drainage improvement and decommissioning planned in the project.” (EA p. 54)

#### **5. Range of Alternatives**

**Response:** The range of alternatives considered in an EA is largely dependent on the purpose and need for the project. A proposal without new roads would not provide access to meet the need to treat many forest units. Further, a proposal with no new roads would not provide an economically viable sale (EA p. 6), as helicopter and fuel costs have greatly increased. Economic viability is a key component of the Purpose and Need for this project, as some of the timber sale receipts would go to O&C counties (EA pp.182-183).

The RMP establishes land allocations and objectives. Objectives for matrix and Adaptive Management Area (AMA) lands includes providing a sustainable supply of timber and providing a variety of habitats (RMP pp. 38-39). The project is consistent with the RMP, as it will produce timber and create a diversity of habitats. The RMP (p. 72) provides clear direction that Adaptive Management Areas (AMA) are available for scheduled timber harvest. The silvicultural systems, objectives and structural diversity requirements are similar to the objectives and management direction for Matrix lands (RMP pp. Matrix: 38-40; AMA: 36-37, 72-75). (EA p. 5). The Cheney Slate project follows direction in the RMP, which identified structural retention/regeneration harvest as the primary method for achieving the sustainable volume goals and objectives for matrix land. Additionally, the objective to provide opportunities for timber harvest into the future (EA p. 7) is consistent both with the RMP as noted above, and the Adaptive Management Area to provide for a stable timber supply (RMP p. 36).

#### **6. Soil Health**

**Response:** The EA discloses (pp. 55, 58, 59), consistent with the RMP EIS (p. 4-12), that road building and tractor yarding will result in soil compaction and soil exposure (EA pp. 40, 41).

Regarding forest thinning and fuel reduction, the analysis (EA p. 60) disclosed that long-term soil productivity would be maintained by retention of organic duff layers, forest litter, and coarse woody debris necessary to support beneficial mycorrhizae, bacteria, and fungi. In Riparian Reserves, biomass removal would be limited to areas accessed by existing roads and skid trails (EA p. 61). Site restoration treatments would be applied after yarding has been completed and would include such activities as ripping / decompaction, water barring, seeding, tree planting and/or blocking as needed (EA p. 30). Project design features stipulate that within units, no more than 12% of the ground would remain compacted following harvest (EA p. 31).

#### **7. Off Road Vehicles:**

**Response:** The EA recognized OHV as an issue (EA p. 11, 15, 29,160), and designated appropriate design features to reduce future potential use (EA p. 57, 158, 163). New roads would be closed and temporary roads would be obliterated and barricaded, which would help reduce the potential future disturbance from OHV. In Riparian Reserves, biomass removal would be limited to areas accessed by existing roads and skid trails. Further, regarding constructed skid trails, site restoration treatments would be applied after yarding has been completed and would include such activities as ripping / decompaction, water barring, seeding, tree planting and/or blocking as needed (EA p. 30). Actions are consistent with the RMP which identified traffic control devices, such as gates, as an accepted method to prevent or reduce adverse OHV impacts (RMP EIS 4-14). In addition, impacts of OHV use on steepest trails would decrease, as trails greater than 55% slope would be rehabilitated (EA pp. 29, 164). Note that the proposal was to rehabilitate slopes greater than 55%, not that only 55% slopes qualified as steep.

While the analysis acknowledges that illegal/unauthorized use will continue (EA pp. 120, 157, 163, 172), each action collectively reduces existing impact and minimizes potential future use, meeting the purpose and need for the project.

This project anticipated that the Elliott Creek area would be managed under the Western Oregon Plan Revision 2008 RMP (EA p. 11) as an OHV emphasis area. With the withdrawal of the 2008 RMP, that is no longer a valid assumption; however, that would not change the analysis or conclusions in the Cheney Slate LMP EA. Therefore, additional analysis is not necessary.

#### **8. Cumulative Effects:**

**Response:** Cumulative effects were analyzed appropriately for each resource as per Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) regulations (EA p. 39). As approximately 80% of the past harvest on BLM lands occurred prior to 1990 (EA p. 42), it would not be relevant to include the past effects of these actions in the analysis as the area impacted by these actions has changed in the 18 to 100+ years since these actions occurred. As an example, with in-growth, 689 of these acres (2.6% of BLM lands), which were clear cut prior to 1970, are nearing 50 to 60 years old (EA p. 41). As stated in the EA:

Information on the current environmental condition is comprehensive and more accurate for establishing a baseline condition for a cumulative effects analysis than attempting to establish such a starting point by adding up the effects of individual past actions. This would provide a

list of effects without addressing the changes or improvement in conditions since the action originally occurred; unlike current conditions, past actions and perceived effects can no longer be verified by direct examination. Therefore, the affected environment and No Action effects sections for each resource considers the current condition as incorporating the effects of past actions, and then adds to this other present and reasonably foreseeable future actions. Following the Code of Federal Regulations and CEQ guidance, the effects sections add the anticipated effects of this project to the current conditions coupled with other present and reasonably foreseeable future actions. By comparing the “no action” alternative (current condition and other present and reasonably foreseeable future actions) to the action alternatives, we can discern the “cumulative impact” resulting from adding the incremental impact of the proposed action (EA pp. 40-41).

It should be noted that there is a confusing statement in the EA on page 39: The sentence states that past practices that contributed to “cumulative effects on sedimentation, salmonid productivity and increases in peak flows in small watersheds” are not longer conducted on public lands. This referred to a statement from watershed analyses that identified high road densities and past patch clearcuts. This statement should be clarified to read that past patch clearcuts are no longer conducted on public lands. It should also be noted that Group Selection harvest and Regeneration Harvest are not synonymous with clearcuts.

#### **9. Special Status Species**

**Response:** A variety of comments stated that effects were not disclosed on a variety of special status species or stating a desire that no effects occur. It should be noted that a project such as this is not intended to have no effects on the resources and species across the landscape, but the EA is intended to adequately disclose those effects to inform the public, and so that a decision can be made as to whether those effects rise to the level of significance, or whether an EIS needs to be prepared. Effects to the following species and habitats were all analyzed to an extent necessary to provide the decision maker with enough information to make a reasoned decision among the alternatives.

**Northern Spotted Owl:** Effects to the Northern Spotted Owl were analyzed in detail and disclosed on pages 123-138 and 155-156; and to spotted owl prey species on pages 139-140; and 154-155, specifically addressing affects to nesting, roosting and foraging habitat, and edge effects to species from road construction. Cumulative effects to owls and other species (EA pp. 155-156) were likewise analyzed as necessary to make a reasoned choice among alternatives.

While the EA considered the information in the Northern Spotted Owl Recovery Plan (EA pp. 9, 27, and Critical Habitat (CHU) designations (EA pp. 2, 122, 128, 131, 140), rescinding of these documents would not change the analysis, especially as this decision is consistent with maintaining or improving habitat with the LSR/AMR and CHU. All actions in this decision are treat and maintain, noncommercial treatments; therefore, there will be no adverse modifications to the CHU under either of the CHU designations. As there will be no adverse modification to the CHU, no additional analysis is required. See Section IV, Consultation and Coordination in the Decision Record for further detail.

*Pacific fisher*: As with the Northern Spotted Owl, the effects analysis for the Pacific fisher and fisher habitat was adequate for the decision maker to make a reasoned choice among alternatives. (EA pp. 140-143). Additionally, impacts to late-successional habitat were disclosed across the watershed (EA 123-138); these effects are relevant to the fisher because key habitat characteristics are similar for both species (EA p. 141). Comments did not say how the analysis was in error, and without further information, it is impossible to assess the comment in any further detail.

Likewise, effects on neotropical birds (EA pp. 150-152); Bald Eagles (EA pp. 152-153) and fish (EA pp. 98-109) were adequately analyzed and disclosed to a level necessary to discern both project and cumulative effects, and to provide the decision maker with adequate information necessary to make an informed decision.

#### **10. Variable Density Thinning**

**Response:** To clarify the description for Variable Density Thinning in the EA (p. 26) in young stands less than 80 years old, spacing of trees remaining after harvest is based on the diameter of trees in the stand. The larger the tree, the more resources it needs; therefore, spacing will be wider between larger trees and closer for smaller trees. To further clarify the reasoning behind this prescription, a specific area of land can support more small trees than large trees. In all cases, the larger trees will be retained in any given area. Again, VDT is prescribed in stands, “that were identified as needing thinning to accelerate tree growth, retard crown recession and introduce structural diversity through the use of gaps and leave patches.”

#### **11. Economic Analysis**

**Response:** As there are constant fluctuations in timber market prices, a detailed market analysis would not be useful in the EA. As an example, after the EA was released, market prices for timber increased. An economic analysis is also not relevant to decision making while a relative economic comparison between alternatives is relevant to making a decision and is provided in the EA (EA pp. 162-163). Economic viability of a timber sale is assessed during project layout, marking and cruising, and includes factors such as logging methods feasibility, hauling distances and a myriad of other factors relevant to a viable timber sale, factors that are not necessary for an informed environmental analysis of project effects.

#### **12. Chemical Controls and Noxious Weeds**

**Response:** Noxious weed control is discussed in the EA; however, treatments will occur under the Medford District Noxious Weed Environmental Assessment (1998) (EA pp. 13, 122), which includes limited use of chemicals to control weeds. Chemical treatments are targeted directly on the noxious weed sites and are not broadcast sprayed. Revisiting the decision made under that EA is beyond the scope of the Cheney Slate project. Noxious weed locations have been mapped and disclosed in the EA (EA Table 40, pp. 114, 121, 122), and target species have been identified (EA p. 114, Table 40).

### **13. Size and number of trees proposed for logging**

**Response:** The volume and diameters of timber proposed for harvest is not relevant to analysis in an EA. However, the number of acres impacted by project activities is relevant to the analysis. For example, the acres of soil displacement, or acres of spotted owl habitat degraded is important, while the volume and diameter of trees does not lend further information that is relevant to this analysis. Actual volume and trees removed is determined after the EA is completed, public comments on the EA are considered, and final sale layout, marking, and cruising occurs. Volume and diameter distribution are presented in the Decision Record.

### **14. Clarifications**

**Response:** There seemed to be some confusion over several terms in the EA as well as the scope of what is required in NEPA analysis. The following information is meant to provide some clarification on these issues.

**Non-riparian old growth (EA p. 68):** The statement in the EA refers to the acreage of old growth forests outside of riparian areas, stating that “none of the areas proposed for treatment in the AMA non-riparian stands qualify as old-growth.” This does not mean that there are no old growth forests in riparian areas; rather, it means that there are no proposals for treatment in old growth outside of riparian areas. Note also that there is also no treatment proposed for old growth within riparian areas.

**Northern Spotted Owl Recovery Plan:** This EA did not depend on the Northern Spotted Owl Recovery Plan for its analysis. Revisiting the Recovery Plan is outside the scope of this EA.

**Road 38-6-1.1:** The EA (p. 21) states that rerouting this road would remove a sediment sources from Cheney Creek. This should read to remove a sediment source from Murphy Creek.

**Western Oregon Plan Revision:** This project was developed under the 1995 RMP. While the Western Oregon Plan Revision decision was signed before the EA was released to the public, the Cheney Slate LMP is consistent with the 1995 RMP.

**Thinning in Riparian Reserves:** The objective of treatments in riparian reserves is to accelerate the development of late-successional conditions, not to enhance stands for timber production. Any commercial product is a byproduct of thinning, not the primary objective.